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# News Release

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## Protecting Heritage Resources During Wildfires

**Yreka, CA-** Archaeological sites are non-renewable resources that can never be replaced. That is why it is so important to protect sites during wildfires and why archaeologists are part of the fire team. Archaeologists are assigned to fire incidents as READs or Resource Advisors to assist firefighters in avoiding damage to or destruction of archaeological sites.

Resource Advisors bring specialized knowledge and training to mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources. They advise incident managers and firefighters in planning fire-containment actions while also protecting fish and wildlife habitat, healthy watersheds, Forest infrastructure and historically significant sites. They can provide vital information on areas to avoid and or protect when planning suppression efforts.

### Preserving History

The same tool kit used by firefighters to protect residences and infrastructure can be used to protect historic resources. A variety of techniques are used to mitigate the risks that fires pose to archeological sites. Flammable materials may be reduced around a site; by constructing hand lines, installing water sprinklers or, using dozers to create a fire break. Specialized fire-resistant wrapping is used to protect standing historic structures such as lookouts, cabins or other historically important features.

### Fire Suppression

When a fire moves through an archeological site unchecked it may consume organic materials, melt glass, tin or metal. However there is always a chance that certain fire-suppression activities could destroy an entire site. Bulldozers pose the greatest risk of damage or destruction to archaeological sites. Archaeologists survey planned bulldozer lines, often walking ahead of a dozer, directing it around archaeological sites, in the course of constructing containment line.

### Post-Fire

In addition to reducing fire impacts and damage caused by fire suppression operations, archaeologists are also involved in rehabilitation activities. After the fire is contained, archaeological sites are visited to determine whether they were burned or impacted in any way. They also determine if any post-fire activities could adversely affect the sites and if so, mitigate the effects.

A significant post-fire concern for archaeological sites is looting and vandalism once protective vegetation has burned away. Damaging, disturbing or destroying archaeological sites is against the law, and doing so can result in fines and/or jail time. The removal of artifacts is also against the law; and while taking one artifact may seem trivial, that one artifact may be the piece of the puzzle that reveals the whole picture of a site. Archaeologists work with law enforcement, other forest staff and the public to deter theft through monitoring, education and outreach.

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